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THE TRAGEDY OF RUSSIA.

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M. KERENSKY:

"I bear witness that the Russian people will never recognise the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, a treaty which has hurled Russia into the abyss of abomination."—*At the Labour Conference, London, June 27, 1918.*

BY

WM. STEPHEN SANDERS,

Labour Delegate to Russia, 1917.

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Wm. Stephen Sanders has been connected with the Labour and Socialist movement of Great Britain for over thirty years. He has occupied important positions in the movement, including Membership of the Executive Committee of the Labour Party, the Secretaryship of the British Section of the International Socialist Bureau, and the Secretaryship of the Fabian Society. He has made special investigations into social, industrial and political conditions in Germany, having studied in that country for a considerable period, and is author of *German Social Democracy*, *Trade Unionism in Germany*, *Is it a Capitalist War?*, *Germany's Two Voices*, *If the Kaiser governed Britain*, *Those German Peace Offers*, and *Pan-German Socialism*. He joined the Army in 1915, and served two years at home and abroad. In 1917 he went to Russia as a member of the British Labour Delegation.

The Tragedy of Russia.

"But there is yet another consequence of a separate peace, more terrible than contributions and the ruin of the country—that is the psychology of a conquered nation. I know this psychology well. France suffered from it for 30 years. Only at the beginning of the twentieth century did I notice the first signs of the rising of spirits in France after the military defeat of 1871, the loss of two rich provinces, payment of huge contributions and humiliating conditions of the peace of Frankfurt. During the whole of these 30 years France lived in terror of new German aggression should her democratic internal policy displease the court of Berlin . . . . . Terror grips me when I think of the precipice to which the advocates of a Hindenburg peace are leading the simple, illiterate, childishly-credulous Russian people."—Peter Kropotkin, the famous Russian reformer.

The ratification by the Council of Soviets at Moscow of the Peace Treaty made between the Bolshevik dictatorship of Russia and the German military autocracy at Brest-Litovsk has placed Russia at the mercy of Prussia. The Russian Revolution of March, 1917, which was heralded as a dramatic triumph of democracy, has proved to be the opportunity of a ruthless conquering militarism. What, under wise leadership, might have been a great movement for the building up of a strong, independent, democratic country, has developed, under the guidance of folly and fanaticism, into an orgie of anarchism which has produced a state of chaos, powerless to resist the extortionate demands of a foreign conqueror.

THE FIRST PHASE.

The men who led the Revolution at its first inception saw clearly that Russia could not secure permanent freedom and could not reconstruct the whole of her industrial, social, and political systems until the German invader, who occupied

enormous tracts of Russian territory, had been beaten. History had taught them that a country situated as Russia was could not at the same time defend herself successfully and carry out at once an immense programme of fundamental changes in its conditions. The first need of a free Russia was security against her militarist enemy, Germany. When her frontiers were made safe, Russia could then devote herself to internal reconstruction on democratic lines.

DIVIDED LEADERSHIP.

Unfortunately, the leadership of the Revolution became divided between two bodies. The Provisional Government which took office after the abdication of the Czar, and which was composed of members of the Duma—the Russian Parliament—who held advanced views, was compelled to divide its authority with the Petrograd Soviet, consisting of representatives of soldiers and workmen. This latter body was composed of men and women holding divergent views on social and political questions, but all claiming to be more or less socialist in opinion. The Petrograd Soviet organized similar bodies in all large centres, and these in their turn claimed equal authority with the local representatives of the Provisional Government. Divided authority, especially in regard to the Army and Navy, inevitably led to confusion and disruption. The Provisional Government was constantly hampered and checked by the Soviets in its efforts to reorganize the Army and Navy for the purpose of resisting the German invaders. The outlook for success in the spring and summer of 1917 was hopeful. The new spirit which the Revolution had evoked was such that, if the Provisional Government had been aided, instead of hindered, by the Soviets, the Prussian and Austrian armies might have been driven back, or at least held up and prevented from obtaining any further advantage. Indeed, in July, 1917, Brusiloff, the new commander-in-chief, proved that the Russian Army was still capable of winning great victories. But a minority on the Soviets was steadily undermining the Government's influence. This minority was the party of the Bolsheviks.

THE BOLSHEVIKS.

The Bolsheviks, who are directly responsible for the ruin of Russia, claim to be Social Democrats, but their policy and actions are in complete disagreement with those of the great mass of Socialists in Russia and other European countries. They are rather followers of the Russian Anarchist, Bakunin, the apostle of terror and violence, than of his opponent, Karl Marx. Their aims were to conclude an immediate peace with Germany and to transform Russia at once into a proletarian communist state by abolishing the rights of all other classes. They took no account of the fact that the Russian people were wholly unfitted to jump at one bound from the present social system to one of ideal communism. Judging from the sympathy expressed in Pacifist circles in England for the Bolsheviks, it may be thought that the Bolsheviks are Pacifists and non-resisters. The direct opposite is the case. They are exponents of physical force, which they use not only against landlords and capitalists, but also against Socialists who do not agree with their anarchic and terrorising proceedings. They have persecuted and imprisoned not only persons whom they label as "middle class," but even members of advanced Socialist organizations who have worked devotedly for years for the liberation of Russia, and who rightly look upon the peace with Germany as the suicide of Russian liberty.

A PARTY OF VIOLENCE.

The secret of the Bolshevik rise to power is that, while other parties talked, they acted. The Bolshevik philosophy scorns democracy and its methods. It teaches the doctrine that an energetic minority has the right to dictate to the majority and force its will upon it even by violence. In both theory and practice there is little difference between the despotism of the Bolsheviks and the autocracy of the Kaiser, except that the latter is "efficient." While other parties were discussing and endeavouring to arrive at decisions in a democratic manner, the Bolsheviks organised armed resistance in the army and among the civilians, not

only against the Provisional Government, but also against the majority in the Soviets who were desirous of saving Russia from the German menace. They went even further, and in January, 1918, suppressed by arms the democratically elected Constituent Assembly.

LENIN AND TROTZKY.

The leaders of the Bolsheviks, Lenin and Trotzky, were not in Russia when the Revolution broke out. They had been in exile for years and knew little or nothing of the conditions in Russia arising from the war. They had no experience of the management and administration of the affairs of a great movement—to say nothing of a great country. They had lived on vague ideas, and were apparently oblivious to reality. This is the most favourable view that can be taken of them and their policy, which has placed Russia at the feet of Germany. Lenin has been described by Maxim Gorki, the well-known Russian Revolutionist, in the following passage :—

"Fancying themselves to be veritable Napoleons, the Lenins, great and small, are going mad and completing the process of the destruction of Russia. Certainly Lenin is a man of extraordinary force. . . . He is a man of genius, possessing all the qualities of a leader, and he does not know the meaning of morality. Certainly, like a *grand seigneur*, Lenin despises the complicated life of the masses, of which he knows nothing at all. He has never lived in close contact with the people; and through books he has not succeeded in understanding the masses. But it is just this fact that makes him capable of rousing into fury the lowest instincts of the working classes. I believe it to be impossible with present conditions of material which we have to create a Socialist State. But why not try? What does the *grand seigneur* Lenin risk, by forcing the people to make the experiment? The risk only exists for those masses whom Lenin despises."

Lenin arrived in Russia from Switzerland in April, 1917. It is significant that he came *viâ* Germany in a special train provided by the Kaiser's Government. Directly he placed his foot on Russian soil he began a propaganda against the allies of Russia in favour of immediate peace with Germany. In a two hours' speech to the Petrograd Soviet he declared that the Russian Army ought not to fight the Germans, but should begin a civil war. His newspaper, *Pravda*, conducted an open pro-German and anti-Ally campaign. No lie against the Allies was too blatant for its columns, no argument too thin. A swarm of local editions of *Pravda*, and one especially for soldiers, were issued, all of which contained statements calculated only too successfully to destroy the confidence of the army and the people in the Provisional Government, and to disorganise the ranks of the soldiers. The splendid offensive of Brusiloff on July, 1917, was described by the *Soldiers' Pravda* as a stab in the back of the German democracy!. The Russian soldiers were invited to fraternise with the enemy on every possible occasion. The Germans and Austrians took advantage of the simplicity of their "comrades" to send officers in the guise of friendship into the Russian lines clad in the uniform of privates and armed with cameras to obtain military information.

CIVIL WAR.

After the Russian advance of July, 1917, Lenin, fearing that his countrymen's victory would lead to a revival of the spirit of the whole Russian Army and spoil his plans for a civil war, attempted to overthrow the Provisional Government (which had been reconstructed and was then almost entirely Socialist in character) by an armed revolt of his followers in Petrograd. This failed, and Lenin for a time disappeared from the scene.

But the poison that he had spread among the troops had taken effect. Although the Provisional Government, with Kerensky at its head, brought in big measures of

internal reconstruction, including one dealing drastically with the burning question of the land, the Bolsheviks continued their disruptive and fratricidal tactics. The armies nearest to Petrograd, the centre of their influence, came almost entirely under their control, and, when the Germans advanced on Riga, the Russian troops retired practically without striking a blow. But their armies, although unwilling to fight Germans, were capable of being incited to fight their own countrymen. Revolt against the Provisional Government was organised anew, and this time it was carried through. In November, 1917, the Bolsheviks succeeded in overthrowing by violence the Provisional Government, and Kerensky and his fellow Socialist ministers were forced to flee for their lives. Lenin and his colleague, Trotzky, were installed in power, and civil war took the place of war with Germany, who was now prepared to take full advantage of the opportunity that Bolshevism had prepared for her.

THE SHAMEFUL PEACE.

Almost the first step of the Bolshevik dictatorship was to open up peace negotiations with the enemy. Sympathisers with the Bolsheviks in this country have maintained that Lenin and Trotzky are clever men of the world, and superior in intelligence and ability to the ordinary diplomatist. Can it be argued that they showed cleverness and intelligence in first disorganising and disrupting the Russian Army—openly declaring that they would not fight—and then appealing to their German enemy with the object of obtaining a favourable peace? It would be just as sensible to expect an armed burglar to agree to give up his swag to a robbed householder who was unarmed, and openly avowed the fact.

It has been said that the Bolshevik leaders have succeeded in "tearing the mask" from the German military Imperialists, in disclosing their duplicity and revealing their true annexationist intentions. But the ordinary man did

not require the assistance of Bolshevik "cleverness and intelligence" to see through the German pretence of discarding annexations and indemnities. Even the derided professional diplomatist was fully aware, before the proceedings at Brest-Litovsk, of how the Kaiser and his government would treat the declaration of ex-Chancellor Michaelis upon the subject. That politician himself, in the very act of making it, stated that he accepted the formula "as he understood it," and the history of Prussian diplomacy shows clearly that a phrase can be "understood" to mean the precise opposite of what the plain words imply.

There was no reason, then, to be surprised when the German military leaders—having played with Trotzky while he thought he was playing with them—brought the deplorable comedy at Brest-Litovsk to a close, and resumed in grim earnest their programme for bringing vast territories within the sphere of the German Empire, in spite of the abject petition of the Bolshevik dictators to be allowed to sign the shameful peace which they had declared intolerable.

"CAINS AND JUDASES."

It may be argued that Lenin and Trotzky were building upon the hope of Revolution in Germany. But Lenin and Trotzky know Germany well. They are, or should be, aware, if they are as "clever" and "intelligent" as their admirers affirm, that the hope of a Revolution in Germany is baseless as long as the German Army is unbeaten. The German Socialists themselves (including their chief spokesman, Herr Scheidemann) have told the world that a Revolution of the kind advocated by the Bolsheviks, or even by less violent factions, can never take place in Germany. *Vorwärts*, the leading German Socialist journal, stated in February, 1918, "The Bolshevik hope of a speedy and violent revolution in Germany is but an irrational dream. The basis of Bolshevism is neither Socialism nor Democracy. The German Social Democracy draws a broad and clear line between itself and the Bolsheviks." It is not to be wondered at that, having

learnt what Bolshevik rule has meant to Russia, the German Socialists—even if they were less tame and law-abiding than is notoriously the case—should shrink from following what has been clearly proved to be a road to disaster. The views of the German Socialists on the Bolsheviks and their policy have been stated in *Vorwärts*, of February 24th, 1918, which says:

> "It is altogether a peculiar thing this fight of the Bolsheviks against Imperialism. It began by completely destroying the Russian fronts. The German Socialists have never regarded such a method of fighting Imperialism as the right one, and, since they themselves would never employ it, they never recommend its employment to the Socialists of other countries. . . . . When the Bolsheviks had no longer any soldiers and no guns at their disposal, they entered into negotiations for peace. Here, also, German Imperialism was not fought, but encouraged. It is simply horrible to think with what levity the Bolsheviks have renounced Russian territory. . . . German Socialists would never have acted in such a way in a similar situation. . . . . The Bolsheviks have served, not the cause of the Revolution, but that of the German Imperialists."

The writer of this article forgets that the German Socialists encouraged the Bolsheviks by attacking Kerensky and the Provisional Government for resisting German Imperialism. It is not surprising that the Bolsheviks now declare that the German Socialists have turned the German workmen into "Cains and Judases."

PLAYING THE GERMAN GAME.

Whether Lenin and Trotzky are, as some people think, German agents, or simply unteachable fanatics, it is perfectly clear on the evidence of Germans themselves that these two men have played the German game. They and their followers made themselves the dictators of Russia, and in a

few months have brought their country to military, economic and social ruin. They have destroyed industry, trade and commerce, and brought starvation to the masses. They have abolished all order and discipline, so that, in the words of Kerensky, "the Russians are acting not as emancipated citizens, but as undisciplined serfs." Murder and robbery are rife in Petrograd and all big centres of population. They have handed over to Prussian domination territory larger than that of the whole German Empire. They have impaired the faith of people in democracy by their madness and folly. They have strengthened militarism in Europe and betrayed the democracies of the allied countries who were fighting on their side.

Lenin was warned by wiser men that it was dangerous in a backward country, such as Russia, whose population consisted mainly of ignorant and credulous peasants, to endeavour to create by force an experiment in social reconstruction for which no preparation had been made. His reply was "Let it be so. Then let Russia perish." These are the words of either a madman or a traitor. No one but a man bereft of his senses or prepared to betray his country would be prepared to take the risk involved by the policy and actions for which he and his faction are responsible. A man with a knowledge of the world such as Lenin is said to possess would be aware that to expect to change successfully the whole construction of society in a few weeks, at a time when a life and death struggle with a powerful foreign foe was in progress, was as foolish as to think that one could smash a complicated watch with a hammer and reconstruct it in a few minutes in the middle of an earthquake.

THE LESSON OF THE TRAGEDY.

The lesson of the tremendous tragedy is clear to all men who still hold the democratic faith: in the face of the organised forces of German militarism the nation must remain

united and refuse to be divided by sectional differences, or led away by vague ideas having no basis in reality. Democracy and liberty imply discipline. Liberty does not mean lawlessless, nor can it allow a dictatorship, whether it be that of Lenin or that of Kaiser Wilhelm. Once liberty becomes degraded into license or is suppressed by anarchist tyranny it will be the working classes who will chiefly suffer, as they are now doing in Russia, either at the hands of the German conqueror or in the fratricidal struggle which Lenin has provoked. Furthermore, it has been proved that to negotiate with the German military despotism with its armies unbeaten means that the cause for which the democratic countries of the world entered upon the war will be lost. Germany played false and showed no mercy to Russia after she had been rendered helpless by the Bolsheviks. The same fate will befall any other country that ventures to follow the same disastrous road.

NOTE I.—What the Bolsheviks have given to Germany.

By the peace of Brest-Litovsk the Bolshevik dictatorship has handed over to German control the whole of Russian Poland and the provinces of Courland, Lithuania, Livonia and Esthonia.

Turkey is to receive back all territory in Asia Minor occupied since the war, including Armenia, and in addition the districts of Ardahan, Kars and Batoum. This will leave Germany and Turkey paramount in the Caucasus.

The civil war in Finland caused by the Bolsheviks has been seized by Germany as a pretext to enter that country and act as protector of law and order, and thus secure control of its destinies. Germany has now complete supremacy in the Baltic. The civil war in the Ukraine has enabled Germany to march into that country and establish herself in the great city of Sevastopol and thus dominate the Black Sea.

In addition to territory Germany has secured an immense number of guns and a vast amount of other war material which the Russians abandoned when the Germans advanced after Trotzky left Brest-Litovsk, having declared that the war was at an end.

In round figures, the territorial losses to Russia amount to 1,400,000 sq. kilometres, with a population of 66,000,000.

NOTE 2.—How the Bolsheviks treat the Workers.

From a statement issued by the Central Committee of the United Labour Party of Russian Social-Democrats, December, 1917, and published by the International Socialist Bureau.

The Bolsheviks, who seized the reins of government three weeks before the elections for the Constituent Assembly, created the Council of People's Commissaries. The members of the Council are formally responsible to a Central Executive Committee, elected by the Second Congress after the departure of all the other Parties. In reality, the Council of Commissaries is nothing but a screen to mask the dual dictatorship of Lenin and Trotzky, sustained by the bayonets of the soldiers and sailors and surrounded by suspicious characters, adventurers and even criminals.

The dictatorship is maintained only by shameless terrorisation. The Council of Commissaries has not yet succeeded in subduing the administrative organisation to its will. The civil servants have refused to work under the direction of the usurpers. Whole districts have refused to recognise the new régime and they are trying to organise district governments. The democratic bodies in the towns and the Zemstvos, elected by universal, direct, secret and proportional suffrage, will have nothing to do with the new régime. They do not recognise it, and resist it.

Finding themselves isolated among democrats, the Bolsheviks have reinforced their system of terrorisation. Lenin has issued a decree with regard to the press such as Tsarism would not dare to conceive. Almost every night printing presses are raided by soldiers and sailors who disperse the type and break the machines. Editors and contributors are imprisoned. The right of combination is trampled underfoot. Public servants on strike are treated with no ceremony. They are arrested, deprived of their bread cards, driven out of their rooms, threatened with lynching, and soldiers and Red Guards are incited to attack them. All political liberties are really suppressed. Petrograd is declared to be in a state of siege. Elections for the Constituent Assembly are held under the menace of arms. Liberty of electoral propaganda does not exist. The leaders of Socialist Parties, such as Gotz, Avksontieff, Grosdieff the workman, and others have had to hide themselves. Candidates for the Constituent Assembly are flogged unmercifully, as for example Alex. Smirnoff, the candidate of our Party and a member of the Soviet Foreign delegation. Deputies elected to the Constituent Assembly are hunted down and have to hide. Those democratic Municipal Councils which have a Socialist majority, as in Moscow, Petrograd and Saratoff, where serious resistance was made to these acts of violence, have been dispersed with bayonets. The new municipal elections will be held under a reign

of terror, and after changes in the electoral law made in the spirit of Bonaparte. Preparations are made openly to disperse the Constituent Assembly unless it meekly sanctions the decrees of the Councils of Commissaries. [The Constituent Assembly was dispersed by the Bolsheviks.]

The Bolshevik dictatorship opens the door to the counter-revolution. The Red Terror paves the way for the White Terror. The attacks which are made upon civil liberties, political rights, and most of all upon universal suffrage, will facilitate the course of the revolution against democracy, and will enable it later to deprive the workers and peasants of all political rights. The Socialist experiments in the industrial sphere will bring about the prohibition of the trade union movement and the suppression of labour legislation. Finally, the absence of any genuine power in the State leads inevitably to the dismemberment of the country into several isolated and hostile provinces.

We, for our own part, regard the unification of all truly Social-Democratic elements in the working-class as our own task; and to further the unification of the whole democracy, so as to organise the struggle against Bolshevik recklessness, and thus avert the savage crushing of the deluded proletariat and the future triumph of the counter-revolution.

The Ukrainian peasant understood how the Germans secure the independence of small nationalities when German bayonets and chemical vapours were employed to rob him of his last crust of bread, and to reinstate all the atrocities of the old regime. They understood the meaning of the dictatorship, not of the proletariat, but over the proletariat who have lost all the political rights which the Revolution gave them, and again live under the police terrorism of the old régime. . . .

The Bolsheviks, or by whatever name they themselves wish to be known, claim that the present state of Russia is a dictatorship of the proletariat, although the most ruthless oppression is applied against the democratic and Socialist parties in Russia and the toiling masses. War has been organised against the helpless population, and every Russian citizen who refuses to recognise this method of government as perfect is declared counter-revolutionary. That is the position of affairs in Russia.

M. KERENSKY, at the Labour Conference,
London, June 27, 1918.

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